

Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 10th January 2021 – Baptism of Christ

Genesis 1.1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19.1-7; Mark 1.4-11

Today we celebrate the baptism of Christ, which was Jesus' definitive call to ministry; and his response was to go away and have a really big think. *"And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him."* These are the verses that immediately follow this morning's gospel reading which we have just heard. Forty days in the wilderness!

Once again it seems that our own communities are being sent into a wilderness, with normal life suspended, with enforced isolation, with hardship, and so on. And it looks like being somewhat more than forty days. At the same time our places of care are becoming battle zones in the face of the new variant of the coronavirus, with the very real threat of our hospitals becoming overwhelmed, and ceasing to be able to treat other sickness. And the situation in our care homes is becoming desperate again as the new variant overwhelms previously Covid-secure protocols. And many are weary of the restrictions, and hungry for human contact, and yearning for normality. And the restrictions can only get stricter.

Perhaps we should recognise that this year, what has happened is that Lent has come rather earlier than usual; and that although it is the Coronavirus and not the Holy Spirit, which is driving us into this wilderness, nevertheless the wilderness remains a place where the Holy Spirit can still find us. The thing about Jesus being driven into the wilderness after his baptism, is that it was a time of preparation, of inspiration, of getting his head straight before starting his ministry in Galilee.

Lent of course is the usual time of preparation for Holy Week and Easter. However I wonder whether one of the best ways we can keep this lockdown, is to see it as a time of preparation. Preparation for the post-Covid world, for the new normal. Of course for now we must seriously follow the Covid disciplines as well, and keep the rules properly, and stay safe, and do our utmost not to be part of unwitting and irresponsible transmission of the virus. Of course we must do all we can to support those on the front line in hospitals and care homes.

We must also do our bit to help refute and resist the foolish conspiracy theories of those who find it difficult to live in the real world, which threaten to undermine the battle against the virus. We have seen this week in the USA where such weakness and lack of courage leads. We need of course to respect the right of people to hold strange views, and to tolerate the reasonable expression of off-beam opinions. But the outlandish views themselves really do not have to be respected, by anyone, at all, and need be firmly resisted by everyone of good will.

The coronavirus is not a hoax; vaccines are indeed good and healthy for the vast majority of people; the lockdown is absolutely necessary; and those who do not believe these things have simply fallen into error. A time of preparation is a time for clear headed recognition of what is true and real, however difficult we may find it. But a time of preparation is also a time for reasonable hope, and a time of new inspiration. *And the Spirit immediately drove him*

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out into the wilderness. Jesus went into the wilderness to be inspired. I wonder what the wilderness we are now entering will inspire us to do when resurrection comes.

We know that a new world is coming is coming, with the vaccines, with new Covid therapies, with the warmer weather. There is real hope. So let us dream of the things that will become possible once again, and let us dream of what we ourselves will do to make them happen. Winter may be here, but it will not be so long. It is more that Lent is here early, so let us make good use of this time of preparation.

Let us trust too that the Holy Spirit will find us here in the wilderness and inspire us anew for our work ahead; as indeed the Holy Spirit found Jesus and inspired him for his work ahead. Amen.

CJ. 10.01.21